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One Of Us: Conjoined Twins And The Future Of Normal



Synopsis

Must children born with socially challenging anatomies have their bodies changed because others cannot be expected to change their minds? One of Us views conjoined twinning and other "abnormalities" from the point of view of people living with such anatomies, and considers these issues within the larger historical context of anatomical politics. Anatomy matters, Alice Domurat Dreger tells us, because the senses we possess, the muscles we control, and the resources we require to keep our bodies alive limit and guide what we experience in any given context. Her deeply thought-provoking and compassionate work exposes the breadth and depth of that context--the extent of the social frame upon which we construct the "normal." In doing so, the book calls into question assumptions about anatomy and normality, and transforms our understanding of how we are all intricately and inextricably joined.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book raises questions about peoples' reactions to conjoined twins that may have important implications for many other unusual traits. It eloquently questions common assumptions about the desire to seem normal. It has led me to wonder about the extent to which healthcare is used to make people more normal at the cost of making them less healthy. The book presents strong evidence that conjoined twins who remain conjoined are at least as well off as those who are separated, and some evidence that separations reduce the twins' life expectancy, possibly by a significant amount. Remarkably, of the twins who remained conjoined to adulthood, only one pair

requested separation (they didn't survive it), and among those whose refused separation are a number whose twin had just died (which meant that separation appeared to offer the only chance for the remaining twin to survive). This doesn't mean conjoined twins are better off that way (those who have been separated seem equally satisfied with their status), but it strongly suggests that decisions to perform separations are motivated by something other than concern over the twins wellbeing. And it suggests that people who claim things like "The proposed operation would give these children's bodies the integrity that nature denied them" are imposing their values on others in ways which would be considered unacceptable if the victims had a little political power. The book reports a fair number of statements by doctors (and occasionally parents) which suggest they consider a normal appearance worth risking health to achieve. The book also theorizes that having a normal child is an important enough part of parents' identity to override their interest in their children's wellbeing.

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